

Discovery Channel Global Education Fund: Bringing the World to the Classroom

Introduction

With the dawn of a new millennium, increasing access to education and improving its quality remains one of the greatest continuing challenges for countries around the world. Countries lacking educational resources are falling behind as the technological revolution spreads across the world. Discovery Channel Global Education Fund (DCGEF) strives to bridge this growing international digital and informational divide. DCGEF is a non-profit 501c(3) organization dedicated to bringing the empowering benefits of technology to children in remote and under-resourced areas around the world.

Access to adequate educational resources, both traditional and technology-based, is unavailable in many countries today. There are approximately one billion non-literate adults (persons 15 years old and above) in the world today, and ninety-eight percent of all non-literates are in developing nations. To address this need, DCGEF partners with local and regional organizations and individuals to provide under-resourced communities access to the same rich array of resources available via video and satellite that more advantaged populations take for granted.

DCGEF Learning Center projects

DCGEF partners with local communities to establish community-managed and community-centered Learning Centers in schools and community centers in rural and under-resourced regions around the world. DCGEF brings to the Learning Center a television, VCR, satellite technology, teacher training and a long-term commitment to the delivery of relevant, locally customized programming. DCGEF is committed to a well-integrated, self-sustaining, community-managed technology project that builds a local infrastructure and capacity to support video and satellite technology today, paving the way for the sustainable introduction of computers and Internet in the future.

Project sustainability is ensured by DCGEF support and infrastructure development over a three to five year period, and by giving immediate ownership of the resources and equipment to the community. DCGEF provides teacher-training programs that focus on how to use video as a teaching tool as well as the technical use of the video equipment. Training programs are developed and regularly modified according to local conditions through ongoing collaboration between DCGEF, local communities, and education experts.

To date, DCGEF's program library consists of 17 half-hour programs, which will expand to 22 in early 2001. Each Learning Center receives the complete library of programming and teacher resource guides that accompany each program and which are customized to local curriculums. DCGEF has programs in English, Spanish, and Ndebele, a local language in Zimbabwe. DCGEF will continue to customize programs into local languages. DCGEF works together with communities to develop video programming and resource guides that are relevant and appropriate. In addition, DCGEF works to make available to Learning Centers programming from any source that meets their varied needs.

DCGEF currently has about 60 Learning Centers in 6 countries: Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Approximately 50,000 students plus their families are served by these centers. By June 2001, 100 DCGEF Learning Centers will be operational. In addition to expanding in Africa and Latin America, DCGEF looks forward to the opportunity to launch the project in Asia, India and Eastern Europe.

Public-private partnerships in education

DCGEF was spearheaded by Discovery Communications, Inc. (DCI) four years ago, when DCI decided to put its vast video library and technological resources to a charitable use. DCI's role as the initiator of the Learning Center project underscores a corporate commitment to education, and the belief that a quality education is an issue that deserves the full attention and involvement of corporations worldwide.

DCI considers its support of DCGEF – and that of other corporate partners- to be in its enlightened self-interest. By investing in education, private companies like DCI are also investing in human capital and therefore, in the development of a prosperous consumer-base worldwide.

DCGEF and solar power

In order for DCGEF to deliver on its promise to bring the empowering benefits of technology to people living in remote and disadvantaged regions of the world, electricity is required. And since DCGEF refuses to be deterred by the absence of grid electricity, we quite naturally need to offer project sites renewable sources of energy. We are proud of our 15 Learning Center sites in Uganda which are entirely solar powered. DCGEF is keen to partner with any organization or corporation from the solar power industry that can help us continue to expand our project to communities in need of power.

For anyone in the solar power industry with commercial interests in a developing country, partnering with DCGEF can offer added value. DCGEF brings educational content and access to a world of information to communities, that together with solar power can empower them to create sustainable in the future.

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